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PP RUEHIK
DE RUEHAH #1273 2810915
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P 080915Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3583
INFO RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5759
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3471
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3335
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4002
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1191
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3979
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 001273

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN; EEB; NEA/IR
ENERGY FOR EKIMOFF/BURPOE/COHEN
COMMERCE FOR EHOUSE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: BACKING OFF ON THE CASPIAN BOUNDARY DISPUTE?

REF: A) ASHGABAT 1265; B) ASHGABAT 947

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) A number of international media outlets have recently cited President Berdimuhamedov's remarks regarding Turkmenistan's Caspian dispute with Azerbaijan, made during his October 1 press conference (Ref A). According to the international media, Berdimuhamedov said that "...we will continue to conduct diplomatic dialogue. But if the parties fail to reach some compromise, then we will seek arbitration..." Many international media interpreted this statement as an indication of Turkmenistan's readiness to soften its stance on the boundary issue, especially compared to Berdimuhamedov's July 24 statement on Turkmenistan's intention to take Azerbaijan to an international arbitration court (Ref B).

13. (SBU) Turkmen national television broadcast a recording of the press conference on the evening of October 1, and Turkmen newspapers published a transcript of the event the following day. In these local media reports, there was no mention of Berdimuhamedov's "diplomatic dialogue" remark. This inconsistency between the international and local media accounts of the president's remarks is either the result of an incorrect translation (Berdimuhamedov answered all questions in Turkmen) or, more likely, the result of government instructions to omit this part of the president's remarks.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: If Berdimuhamedov actually expressed willingness to continue negotiations with the Azeris and the remark was deleted on instructions from the government, it suggests that the message was intended only for an international audience. In essence, the Turkmen government sent a signal to the Azeris that a diplomatic solution is still an option. The softer approach might also indicate that the Turkmen government realizes that the harsh rhetoric on this issue (Ref B) has not had the desired effect of persuading either Azerbaijan or the international community to step up efforts to resolve the dispute. As for the edited version of the president's remarks, tailored for internal consumption, it might have been done to prevent an impression among the public that the

Turkmen government is backing off on the Caspian dispute with Azerbaijan. END COMMENT.

CURRAN